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PRESS RELEASE

—For Immediate Release—

Members of the Evening Star Grange are co-recipients of this year's Judicial Branch Volunteer of the Year Award. Members of the Grange were recognized for their tireless work over several years to prepare and donate the Kiddie Ditty bags that have been given to hundreds of children in courthouses around the state. Chief Justice Leigh Saufley presented a plaque recognizing this achievement to representatives of the Grange during a ceremony at the Maine Judicial Center in Augusta. In attendance were members of the Supreme Judicial Court, the Judicial Branch Performance Council, and numerous Judicial Branch employees.

The Kiddie Ditty bags, which are prepared by Grange members, are filled with books and age appropriate toys, such as small stuffed animals, puzzles, action heroes, or small cars and trucks. With the permission of a child's parent or guardian these bags are given to children by Clerks' Office Staff. Children are often brought to court for what can be a lengthy, confusing, and even disturbing process, and the contents of these bags make the visit much more bearable for these young visitors.

Chief Justice Saufley presented the award to the representatives of the Evening Star Grange, noting that, “The gift bags bring smiles to the faces of the children, and assist in keeping them occupied while in our courthouses.” The Chief Justice noted that the necessity of visiting a courthouse can be a difficult experience for anyone, especially for the children, and the Kiddie Ditty bags provide an important and effective way to ease the burden of those visits.

The Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award is presented on an annual basis to that person or program who, in a voluntary capacity, assists the Judicial Branch in fulfilling its mission of administering justice by providing an accessible, efficient, and impartial system of dispute resolution. The members of the Grange have worked with the courts since 2001 when the Kiddie Ditty bag concept was developed through the Maine Volunteers for Justice program. They raise funds, purchase the materials, and compile the bags, delivering them to the Administrative Office of the Courts for distribution to courthouses throughout the state.

The members of the Evening Star Grange have volunteered their time and provided a tremendous service to the Judicial Branch and to the public, especially to the youngest members of the community. As a result they have earned this recognition as Outstanding Volunteer of the Year.